

Poland Historical Geography: Polish History through Maps and Gazetteers

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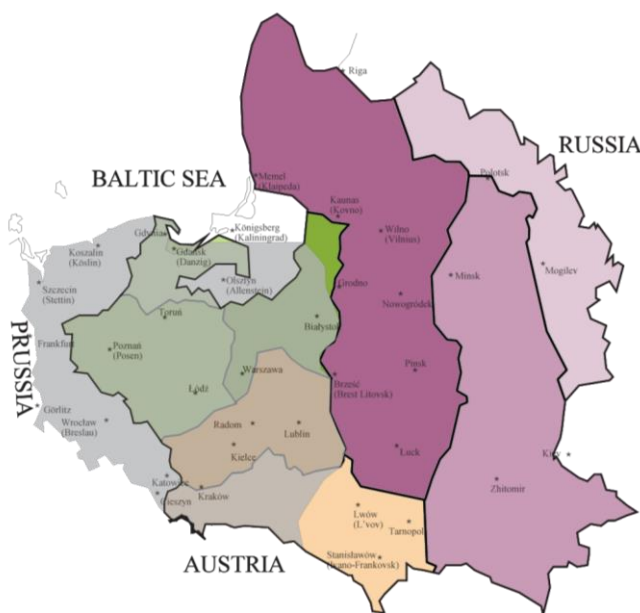
HISTORY OF POLAND

Polish Commonwealth, 1600s-1795

Instead of a hereditary monarchy, they elected their own king. Because the king was elected, this allowed foreign powers to manipulate the elections for candidates, and to create turmoil for their own gain. The commonwealth was in a state of decline because of wars, political turmoil, and aristocratic rebellions. Although reforms were attempted, Poland's neighbors saw opportunities for themselves.

Partitions of Poland, 1772-1795

- **First partition, 1772:** Rebellion occurred in 1768, bringing Poland into a civil war. Austria, Prussia, and Russia collectively decided to annex pieces of Poland for themselves during the war.
- **Second partition, 1792:** Poland institutes a constitution in 1791. This angered Russia, who encouraged another rebellion against the Polish king. Russia provided military support to the rebellion. After a few months, Russia and Prussia slice off large sections of Poland.
- **Third partition, 1795:** Some nobles were angry at their king for surrendering to Russia during the second partition, and created another uprising. Russia invaded again to crush the uprising. Russia, Austria, and Prussia decided to split the rest of Poland between themselves, and Poland disappeared off the map.



Kingdom of Poland, 1815-1914

The French created the Duchy of Warsaw during the Napoleonic Wars as a semi-independent country. After the war, the Kingdom of Poland was established, but was joined to the Russian Empire; they were allowed their own constitution and military. After several uprisings, the Polish language and culture were suppressed, the kingdom was more integrated into the Russian Empire. Starting in April 1868, records were required to be written in Russian.



Republic of Poland, 1918-1939

After World War I, Poland again appeared on the map. Austria and Germany lost the war, while Russia was involved with the Bolshevik revolution. Poland regains much of the territory it held during the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The invasion of Poland in September of 1939 triggered World War II, as Germany and the Soviet Union had secretly agreed to divide the country. The border that Germany and the USSR agreed to was very important – it is the basis for the modern boundary between Poland and its eastern neighbors Belarus and Ukraine.

Modern Poland, 1945-today

After Germany lost World War II, the boundaries shifted again. The USSR claimed the eastern territory that it acquired during the war, and the allies agreed. Large pieces of territory that were part of Germany before the war were now given to Poland to compensate for the eastern losses. After the war, the majority of Polish people living in the lost territory (over 2 million) were forcibly moved into the new boundaries, most settling in the recently-evacuated German territory in the west. Unlike at any time in the past, modern Poland is almost exclusively made of ethnic Polish people.

GAZETTEERS

A gazetteer is a geographical dictionary or index. They contain information about locations and usually jurisdictions (county, province, etc.). Depending on the gazetteer, you may find the location of civil registration offices (where births, marriages, and deaths were registered with the government), parish churches, and synagogues. Some gazetteers can contain very detailed information about locations. The gazetteers listed below are organized by time period and areas they cover. You may want to look for your town in multiple gazetteers, as jurisdictions change over time.

Each gazetteer is organized differently, and some are available online. For some gazetteers, instructions on how to use the gazetteer or access it online are available in the form of “How to” Guides. These “How to” Guides are available in the FamilySearch Wiki under the article **Poland “How to” Guides**. The gazetteers that have “How to” Guides have an asterisk next to them.

GERMAN PARTITION

The gazetteers listed under this section cover the parts of modern Poland that were under the Kingdom of Prussia before World War I. All three gazetteers cover the same territory, but each gazetteer has different strengths.

*Meyer’s Gazetteer – www.meyersgaz.org

Meyer’s gazetteer is now available online. It is a searchable database. It shows the location of civil registration offices. One of the most useful features is the online maps, showing the early twentieth-century map overlaid on Google maps.

*Kartenmeister – www.kartenmeister.com

Kartenmeister is an online searchable gazetteer database, with most of its data reflecting information from 1905. It lists the location of the Catholic and Lutheran parish for most places, as well as civil registration office. One of its strengths is the inclusion of the current Polish name of the town, as well as a link to Google maps.

***1905 Prussian Gazetteer** – <https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/14875>

The 1905 Prussian Gazetteer is available online as digitized scans of the original volumes. It contains information about civil registration offices, as well as Catholic and Lutheran parishes. This gazetteer lists the population of each location, including breakdown by ethnicity and religion.

RUSSIAN PARTITION

Called Congress Poland or the Kingdom of Poland, the Russian partition is not as well-represented as the German or Austrian partitions. The two gazetteers listed in this section only cover some of the Russian partition, but are useful for Polish people living east of the official Kingdom boundaries. As the Kingdom of Poland was incorporated into the **Republic of Poland** after World War I, use the gazetteers in that section for identifying locations in this area.

***RGN Gazetteer** – <https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/205134>

The *Russisches Geographisches Namenbuch* (RGN) Gazetteer was compiled after World War II, but it sought to list all locations within the pre-1917 Russian Empire. It only covered parts of the Kingdom of Poland. The basis of this gazetteer is the *Spiski* Gazetteer below, but it contains additional entries from Austrian Galicia. It contains information about jurisdictions. It is written in Russian, German, and Polish.

***Spiski Gazetteer** – https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Russia_Gazetteers

The *Spiski* Gazetteer was compiled during the Russian Empire time. This gazetteer is organized by *gubernia* (province) and *uyezd* (district), and then geographically rather than alphabetically. The text is in Russian.

AUSTRIAN PARTITION

The Austrian partition was called *Galizien* or in English, Galicia. The territory of Galicia is now split between modern-day Poland and Ukraine.

Genealogical Gazetteer of Galicia – <https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/963643>

This gazetteer contains the most useful information about towns within Galicia. It includes the location of the Catholic parish of each place, as well as information about Greek Catholic, Lutheran, and Jewish congregations. Locations are given in Polish, German, and Ukrainian.

Gemeindelexikon – Galizien (volume 12) - <https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/218291>

The *Gemeindelexikon* is available as digitized images of the original volumes. It contains information about population, including breakdown by religion.

***RGN Gazetteer** – <https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/205134>

The RGN Gazetteer, as described in the Russian section, contains information on locations within Galicia.

REPUBLIC OF POLAND

***Skorowidz Gazetteer** – <https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/197347> and <http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=12786&from=publication>

The *Skorowidz* Gazetteer is one of the most useful gazetteers for Poland. It is available online as digital images of the original two volumes. Among other things, it lists the type of location it is (city, town, village, settlement, etc.), several jurisdictions, and church parish locations.

Słownik Geograficzny Gazetteer – http://dir.icm.edu.pl/Słownik_geograficzny/

The *Słownik Geograficzny* Gazetteer is the most detailed gazetteer available for Poland. The gazetteer is available online as digital images of the original 15 volumes. Each location entry includes detailed physical descriptions of the surrounding land, population, jurisdictions, and location of parishes.

MODERN POLAND

Spis Gazetteer – <https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/147107>

The *Spis* gazetteer covers modern Poland. It lists jurisdictions as well as the location of civil registration offices.

MAPS

Why use maps? They can help identify:

- surrounding villages and towns
- surrounding churches
- political and religious jurisdictions

ONLINE MAPS OF EASTERN EUROPE

University of Texas Libraries – http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/eastern_europe/

3rd Military Mapping Survey of Austria-Hungary – <http://lazarus.elite.hu/hun/digkonyv/topo/3felmeres.htm>

Mapa.Szukacz.pl – <http://mapa.szukacz.pl> or <http://www.pilot.pl>

Geographic Atlas of the Kingdom of Poland – <http://www.ipgs.us/mapinfo/atlas1907/main.html>